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ABSTRACT

The changes in written and spoken Spanish proficiency of two college students during a semester of study in Spain are examined in their oral and written performance and in their grades at a Spanish university. Both students were initially rated, according to American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL) proficiency guidelines, at Intermediate Mid in oral proficiency interviews, and on returning to the United States they were rated Intermediate High/Advanced and Advanced Plus. One student had also overcome lifelong timidity and a dislike of interviews. Letters written at regular intervals to a teacher in the United States, when examined according to ACTFL proficiency guidelines, showed increased creativity and naturalness and reduced errors; the language proficiency in the last letters was rated Advanced Plus. The grades and comments received by both students on their Spanish university transcripts were high. It is concluded that the students were highly motivated during their study abroad and did course work superior to what they would normally do at home. (MSE)

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"The Miracle Happens 'Over There':
Tracing the Development of the Productive Skills of
Two Study Abroad Students"

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"The magic all happens 'over there.'" I quote E. R. Mulvihill, for many years the coordinator of the Wisconsin-Purdue-Indiana Study Abroad Programs in Europe. Indeed, "the magic happens 'over there'" but we seldom test or evaluate it.

Judith Liskin-Gasparro, Educational Testing Service, Princeton, N. J., tested the improvement in the speaking ability of 15 Boston College students who studied in Madrid in 1983-84. She interviewed them and found that some moved from Novice to High on the ACTFL Oral Proficiency Scale.¹

In 1985 I wanted to follow the progress, both in speaking and writing ability, of two of my students during their semester of Study Abroad. My criteria were the ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines for speaking and writing, specifically the Oral Proficiency Interview in the case of speaking.²

First I am going to introduce my two students, Nancy and Bill, and describe their orientation to Spain. Then we will look at their oral proficiency interviews. Following we will observe their progress in writing. Lastly we will compare the grades they earned as shown on the transcript of their studies at the University of Valladolid with the progress I observed.

Nancy Halvorson and Bill Nelson were college juniors who had studied two years Spanish in Minnesota and Wisconsin high schools of approximately 400 enrollment. Bill studied Spanish 101 and 102 with me and was remembered for his enthusiasm and erratic attendance. Nancy studied with other professors. They progressed through Spanish 201 and 202 and enrolled in Spanish 301, Advanced Composition and

Conversation, in the fall of 1984. They did not know each other and never had a class together. Both were Business majors with a minor in Spanish. Both wanted to study in Spain but Nancy feared that some programs would not accept her because she did not have a 3. GPA.

Meanwhile the University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire was considering the Curso para Extranjeros at the University of Valladolid as its official program in Spain. After a year of correspondence I had gone to Valladolid in July 1984 to meet the director, Dr. César Hernández, and learn more about the program. Our Spanish faculty decided to recommend Valladolid to two faculty committees. We also recommended the program to Nancy and Bill, who thus became a small 'Pilot Program' there.

I was the liaison for them between the two schools and also organized the orientation for them in Eau Claire, Madrid and Valladolid. The students were enthusiastic, cooperative, interested. We met in my office and in my home, singly, together, with their parents, and with Yolanda Molina, a Spanish student at our university who would initially guide them around Madrid. Incidentally, Nancy's father questioned whether she could fend for herself in Spain in the language, and her mother, in a phone call, talked about Nancy's shyness, certainly a factor in speaking a foreign language, as Lado, Rivers and Valette have pointed out.³ The students saw slides, studied maps and city plans and went home at Christmastime armed with books and folders.

I met them in Madrid on January 5 and spent three days showing them small museums and introducing them to friends, restaurants, shops and events, like the Cabalgata. In those

few days I noticed that Bill was outgoing, trying to communicate exclusively in Spanish, and writing down new phrases and vocabulary in a little notebook (Me cayó bien; Vale; ¡Qué barbaridad!; cocido; turrón; almendras). Despite a baggage delay of five days, Nancy was happy in Madrid, though less willing to speak Spanish unless she was shopping.

Once in Valladolid they met many of my friends there and were invited to two homes for meals. They were anxious to meet their families and were indeed able to go to their homes before the other American exchange students arrived, Nancy and Bill were most grateful for the orientation in Madrid and Valladolid. They had received a lot of language input in both cities and were beginning to discern if a cab driver had spoken clearly/colloquially/correctly. In both cities they especially enjoyed meeting Spanish young people. During the course of the semester they were to become good friends of one of the four sons of a classmate of mine at the Universidad Central in Madrid 30 years before! And this young man, Pablo Mateu, would travel to Minneapolis in July to be a counselor at the Concordia College International Village El Lago del Bosque, while Bill would be a counselor at an English Camp near Jaca.

When I left Valladolid, they knew that I would be returning in March, with the express interest of observing their speaking ability. So now, let us look at the Oral Proficiency Interviews with Nancy in December 1985, July and September 1986, with Bill in September and December 1985, March and September 1986. In Nancy's first interview she talked freely about her family, described her new friend,

Bill, and spoke about their forthcoming trip to Spain. The imperfection of the Spanish ere and erre was noticeable. She often lacked vocabulary and would substitute English:

Va en abril para su concert band de colegio.

nada else

The nada else of course also showed breakdown. Repeated grammar errors included para for por in time expressions, ser for estar with bien, gerunds for infinitives after prepositions and errors in pronoun placement:

me gustalo quiero lo

She made errors in some verbs and idioms:

No sé que trajera para el padre

Cuando yo era nueve años.

At the end she fell down while discussing the family's trips to Banff:

Fuimos fishing y sightseeing. Nada mucho pero relaxing.

I believed that she rated Intermediate Mid on the OPI.

In the two interviews in the fall semester, Bill's speech was flowing but he lacked vocabulary (a blanket was blanqueta; heridos were huridos, he didn't know entrenador, but picked up on it when I used it and re-used it later.)

He made many ser-estar errors:

ser en un país extranjero

es 100 milles al sur

es en mala condición

fueron preocupado

He expressed age using estar and ser but not tener:

yo estaba 15 años

cuando yo era 15 años

mi hermano es años mi menor

Bill's pronunciation was good and he had no trouble comprehending. He narrated in the past and used occasional verbs in the near-future, future and conditional. Some grammatical errors (tan muchas, de el, rompidas) did not hamper communication. (Tape I)

I rated Bill Intermediate Mid on the first OPI and also on the second in December when he made repeated errors in the first person plural future endings (llegaremos, iramos) and on verbs and vocabulary.

When I returned to Valladolid in March, I found out that Nancy and Bill had both 'tested in' to the upper level of the two-tiered Curso. That spoke well for their prior preparation but was no predictor of their success there. I spent a few hours with Nancy during my visit but did not interview her-once because she had a terrible cold, once because my recorder broke down. I observed, when I visited their classes, that she spoke English with classmates and with her American roommate while Bill used Spanish almost exclusively. His roommate, Tomo, a Japanese, spoke no English so Spanish was the language of their home.

Bill and I spent a late afternoon together, chatting, doing the OPI, and shopping. He also took me for a long walk in very cold weather, using some newly-acquired knowledge of architecture en route. Five times he was greeted by friends on the street. No English was spoken.

In the March interview Bill asked me frankly about half-way through the interview, "Cree usted that he mejorado un poco?" He also said, "Para mi escribiendo no es un problema. Pero alrededor de las 12 estoy harto de hablar.

Pero he tenido sueños en español." Bill was using all the tenses but with some errors in narration in the past. Most noticeable was his use of idioms, some incorrect but comprehensible, and the amount of subjunctive, usually correct. (Tape II)

Nancy went to Eau Claire on July 7 - one month after returning from Spain. Judith Liskin-Gasparro had recommended interviewing her soon after she returned. Nancy's family had Pablo Mateu as a house guest two days and thus had been using Spanish more than usual. She confessed that she didn't like interviews. I wondered whether her dislike of the OPI and her shyness would also hinder her performance. It didn't! Any 21-year-old foreign student who had the presence of mind to break a finger of the gypsy thief who had stolen \$200.00 from her surely had overcome some of her timidity! Nancy's interview had no pauses, no stumbling for vocabulary. In five months in Spain she had made considerable improvement. I rated her Intermediate High on the OPI, very close to Advanced.

Bill returned in August and I interviewed him in September. He talked naturally on many subjects, using a large quantity of subjunctive, idioms common to the young people of Spain and a nice Castillian accent. A couple of errors in ser and estar were offset by dozens of correct usages of the two verbs in many tenses. I rated Bill Advanced Plus on this interview. In eight months Bill had improved from Intermediate High to Advanced to Advanced Plus. Also in September I had the occasion to observe him in conversation with a student from Puerto Rico. I must confess that his listening comprehension was equal to mine.

Thus we see that this student improved in both receptive and productive skills from a Study Abroad semester and a summer work experience in Spain.

According to the ACTFL Guidelines for speaking we see characteristics of the Advanced level in both students: "a speaker who can do more than ask and respond to questions, is able to live and function in the target culture, can move beyond focus on personal welfare to talk about other people, places and external events, can handle unexpected situations, can describe and narrate and speak about past, present and future events, can talk on the telephone.⁴ Because Nancy still had problems with preterite and imperfect verbs and lacked vocabulary, I rated her Intermediate High on an interview in September. An outside observer might find Nancy close to Advanced. I am conscious of the accuracy factor, having refereed her writing, also; thus I noted recurring errors in por-para, the use of a, etc. She showed improvement in fluency and certainly became more outgoing in her five months of living and studying in Spain. Her speaking ability did not grow as dramatically as Bill's although they both write at the Advanced level.

To summarize, I noted improvement in spoken Spanish in both students, especially in Bill. Some of the reasons were his need to speak it constantly in his home, his outgoing personality, and his longer stay in Spain.

Now I will interview Bill to give you a chance to evaluate him. (Interview

Let us now look at the other productive skill-writing. In order to follow the student's progress in writing, I gave them each five aerogramas and asked them to write to me at the end of every month of the Curso. On the side of the air letters, I wrote suggested topics to elicit certain

content and grammar points:

January:	Mi familia española Mis clases (description in the present)
February:	La Universidad Valladolid (description in the present and past)
March:	Nuestra reunión (narration in the past) Mis planes para el verano (narration in the future)
April:	Mis vacaciones (narration in the past, opinion, judgment)
May:	Impresiones del semestre (subjunctive) Posibilidades para el futuro (future, condicional, conjecture subjunctive.)

I answered each letter, adding a few corrections and comments on grammar points at the end. The students could have NOT written; they were under no obligation to do so. On the contrary, they wrote - Bill four times and Nancy five.

What to look for? Higgs suggests looking for communication and accuracy of expresion to test written communicative competence.⁵ Fischer lists pertinence, clarity of expression and grammar.⁶ And we have, of course, the ACTFL provisional descriptions for writing, to which we will match Nancy's and Bill's writing shortly.

In the letters I hoped to observe a growing naturalness in style, and accuracy and increased vocabulary. I will describe the writing of the first two letters from both students and short portions from the remaining letters.

Nancy's errors in ser/estar, por/para, estar, with bien and bueno in the oral proficiency interviews carry over in her writing: He sido muy ocupada; Gracias para trayendo mi dinero; Kathy y yo hicimos una tarta que trai conmigo de los EEUU. Era bastante bien. Also noticeable were errors in the uses of -a: He conocido mucha gente; Me gusta mucho a ver los disfraces. Gustar presented problems: La familia les gusta mucho; Mi familia española le gustan mucho los regalos de mi madre.

On the plus side, Nancy wrote: "Ya estoy soñando en español muchas noches." Yet I noted that Nancy was often thinking in English, as when she wrote: Voy a contarte en mi próxima carta sobre mis vacaciones porque mis planes han cambiado mucho desde hablando contigo.

Bill's letters had few errors. In the first I corrected Hace muy frío; Lo es muy cómodo; and La próxima fin de semana. His second letter began:

"¿Cómo está usted? Acabo de recibir su carta esta mañana. A mí me parecē que se encuentra muy bien pero eso no me sorprende mucho. Ud. parece siempre estar de buena."

Sometimes Bill created a bit too much!

In his third letter he compared the Curso with one in Sevilla:

"Mientras estuve en Torremolinos topé con unas chicas de Madison, las cuales estudian en un programa de intercambio en Sevilla. Desde la impresión del programa que me habían dado, es más fácil evaluar el nuestro. Primero, la calidad del español hablado por ellas fue muy variada, pero, por tanto, bajo el nivel

de mis compañeros. Además, se quejaron de las dificultades que tienen en entender los andaluces. En suma, me parece que hacemos bien aquí en Valladolid por varias razones: 1. se habla muy bien el castellano, 2. la manera más personal de la enseñanza, 3. el mejoramiento de la habilidad de comunicarse de los alumnos.

In Nancy's last two letters some of the previously repeated errors had disappeared although she had some problems with preterite/imperfect:

"La primera noche en Barcelona, Kathy hizo daño a su pie (un esquince) y despues no pudo andar mucho. Mientras ella estaba descansando en el hotel, yo fui a la playa de Sitges, un pueblo pequeño cerca de Barcelona cada día, porque como era la Semana Santa, la mayoría de los museos estuvieron cerrados. Después de 7 días en Barcelona, fuimos a Lloret del Mar, otro pueblo pequeño cerca de Barcelona, pero solamente pudimos quedarnos allí una noche porque Kathy le dolía mucho el pie y tuvimos que regresar a Valladolid el miércoles 10 de abril. En fin, era una vacación muy aburrida y cara. Quería ver el sur pero no había habitaciones en ninguna parta del sur."

More than accuracy, there was a natural flow of language.

"Ya recibí mi billete de Spantax para el 2 de junio. Ese día es el mismo día que los estudiantes de Pennsylvania van a salir de España - el mismo vuelo. Luego trabajaré mucho durante el verano en Bloomington antes de regresar a Eau Claire para estudiar. Voy a vivir allí con algunas amigas mías en una casa - creo que está cerca de 9th y Niagara."

Nancy and Bill mailed their last letters in late May. Bill wrote:

"Ahora mis colegas y yo nos encontramos muy ocupados por los trabajos y exámenes que nos esperan." "Jugué el fútbol con Pablo el otro sábado y lo pasamos divinamente aunque mi equipo perdió por bastante. Sin embargo, he cogido la afición y juego con mis amigos españoles cada jueves.

Pienso en volver a los EEUU al principio de agosto y luego a Eau Claire para buscar un piso. Y aclarar las cuestiones escolásticas que tengo. En cuanto sepa cuando esté, le avisaré para que podamos charlar un poco. Hasta aquel entonces trataré de mantener contacto de alguna forma u otra. ¿Vale?"

Meanwhile, we note Nancy's self-correction of ser-estar and a errors:

"Acabo de acostumbrarme estar aquí y tengo que salir. Es una lástima pero también tengo muchas ganas de ver a mi familia y amigos. El fin de semana pasado fui a Albacete otra vez para ver a mi amiga, Marisa. Estuve un poco triste saber que no le veré para mucho tiempo.

She added:

"Me gusta España muchísimo. Me gustaría viajar más aquí y quizás aún trabajar aquí algún verano pero es una pena que cuesta tanto a volar a España."

Later she made a good analysis of her abilities in the language:

"Yo creo que he aprendido mucho aquí sobre la lengua española y la manera de vivir aquí pero no sé si se nota o no. Entiendo mucho más ahora, probablemente

porque leo libros, revistas y periódicos aquí y también porque miro la televisión.

Mi pronunciación de la lengua española es horrible, probablemente porque nunca he dado clases de conversación o fonética. Y todavía no puedo pronunciar el r en español. Aunque mi español ha mejorado mucho, mi inglés es muy mal.

According to the ACTFL Guidelines we can see characteristics of the Advanced Plus level in the students' writing: "Can write fairly detailed resumes and summaries and take quick accurate notes. Can write most social and informal business correspondence. Can describe and narrate personal experiences and explain simple points of view in prose discourse. Can write about concrete topics relating to particular interests and special fields of competence. Normally controls general vocabulary with some circumlocution. Often shows remarkable fluency and ease of expression but may be inaccurate or incomprehensible under time constraints and pressure... Areas of weakness range from simple constructions, such as, plurals, articles, etc. to more complex structures."7 From the Superior Level we can extract the ability to write short research papers and handle topics in special fields. Nancy's trabajos monográficos received high grades. César Hernández commented on the weeks of hard work and consultation which went into their papers.

This semester Bill and Nancy are in my Survey of Spanish literature class. Yesterday I had the chance to read their essays on the Celestina. I have selected a portion of each to read to you:

"En el cuento La Celestina represente la edad media porque fue alcahueta y muy independiente para su época y porque tuvo una brujería (hay mucha superstición de una brujería.) El realismo fue importante en su vida. Tambien los sirvientes de la Celestina representen la edad medieval. Otras características medievales que son representados en el cuento son el tema de honor de la chica (Melibea) y la honra de Calisto; la religion (porque uno fue judeo y uno cristiano.")

Here is the other essay:

"La Celestina en conjunto representa las dos Españas del Renacimiento. Los personajes de la obra demuestran que en España el Renacimiento no significaba un cambio completo de ideas y creencias entre la gente, sino que se mezclaban las filosofías de la Edad Media y Renacimiento para formar un aspecto propio al Renacimiento español.

Por un lado hay la Celestina misma y los sirvientes. Ellos caracterizan todo lo medieval. Primero son de la clase baja, o sea, les falta una educación buena. El renacimiento fue la época en que florecia la popularidad de libros. Tambien la Celestina se refiere a Dios en una manera negativa, es decir que habla constatemente de pecado y los castigos que recibe uno si ha pecado. Los sirvientes y la Celestina son sumamente materialistas, no cabe duda que su propia ganancia era el unico proposito de la Celestina. Otros rasgos de la Edad Media que se ve en estos personajes son un cierto pesimismo, evidencia de la brujería y una moralidad rigida que restringia la

libertad personal. En suma, todas estas características representan el sentido realista de la clase baja de aquella época.

I believe a lot of 'magic' happened over here in Spain in the productive skills of Nancy and Bill. It shows in 1. the interviews, 2. the letters, 3. their grades.

César Hernández wrote to me when he sent their transcripts:

Estimada colega y amiga:

Le envío los certificados de calificaciones de sus dos alumnos.

Han aprovechado bien el curso: Han trabajado bien, han progresado, se han divertido y su estancia fue agradable. Enhorabuena.

Here are the grades they received:

Lengua española - Nancy 7.5, 8 Bill 8.5, 9

Comentarios de textos literarios - Nancy 9, 9.5, Bill 8.5, 8.

Historia de España - Nancy 7, Bill 8

Arte Español - Nancy 10, Bill 10

Cultura de España Actual, Nancy 9, Bill 7.5

Trabajos monográficos - Nancy 9, 10 Bill 6.5 7.5

On both transcripts we read: "De las anteriores calificaciones y de la estimación general expresada por los profesores, resulta como calificación media global la de Sobresaliente."

I believe that these students were highly motivated and did course work superior to what they normally do at home. The 'magic' happened 'over there.'